

ABA Center for Pro Bono

Pro Bono Spotlight: Holwell Shuster & Goldberg LLP

Today, we are highlighting the pro bono work by the attorneys of Holwell Shuster & Goldberg (HSG). HSG was founded in 2012 as a boutique commercial litigation firm with a strong commitment to pro bono. The founding partners envisioned a firm that would give back to society through pro bono work. We spoke with HSG Partners [Blair Kaminsky](#) and [Vince Levy](#) about HSG's commitment to pro bono and some of the pro bono work being done by attorneys at the firm.

WHAT IS THE PRO BONO CULTURE AT HSG?



Blair: Pro bono is one of the founding principles of HSG. One of the reasons the founding partners started the firm was to serve the public good. There is a lot of encouragement from the very top for associates and young lawyers to find pro bono opportunities. HSG's pro bono practice areas are largely driven by associate interests. If lawyers find the cases they are passionate about, the partners are very supportive of them taking those cases pro bono.

The firm has a monthly luncheon where we meet and talk about pro bono cases. The meeting is attended by partners, associates, and staff attorneys. It's a very collaborative group. At the luncheon, everyone spends time talking about what they are doing and if there is room for others on the team.



Vince: The pro bono culture really comes from one of the founding partners, [Richard J. Holwell](#), who is a former judge for the Southern District of New York. As a group, the partners care deeply about pro bono. The firm culture is very encouraging of pro bono work.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF PRO BONO WORK BEING DONE AT HSG?

Blair: We have had associates work on every type of pro bono case you can imagine. As just one example, we currently have an associate representing a prisoner who is vegan for religious reasons, but is concerned that he is not getting vegan meals.

As another example, we have developed a relationship with the Office of the Appellate Defender (OAD) in New York City. The OAD provides pro bono appellate representation to criminal defendants in New York courts, and they often partner with major firms all over New York City to provide pro bono representation. OAD work has given our associates some very interesting matters, including oral argument opportunities at the First Department and New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest court.

Vince: We have five or six cases with OAD right now. One of them is in the New York Court of Appeals and one of our associates, Scott Danner, will be arguing that case very soon. The partners also encourage the associates to work closely with them on the pro bono cases. We are fortunate to have a former state appellate judge who was also a prosecutor, and a federal judge as partners, and this is incredibly helpful in the context of the OAD cases.

Blair: HSG is also a corporate partner with HerJustice – a nonprofit that provides free legal services to women living in poverty in New York City. HerJustice provides representation in family law, domestic violence, and immigration cases. In this capacity, we have one associate who is assisting with a litigated divorce case, and several others working on different matters. HSG recently did a joint clinic with attorneys at VISA, where each of the attorneys took on a HerJustice client for a pro bono divorce case. It was a great way to get to know some of the lawyers that work at VISA, including several who traveled to New York to participate in the clinic.

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Vince: We have also partnered with the ACLU in trying to improve the employment situation for women at Frontier airlines. We filed charges with the EEOC on behalf of women pilots who face unfavorable policies related to pregnancy and postpartum accommodations, including breastfeeding. After we filed the charges against Frontier Airlines, we have seen some positive developments in the industry although much work remains to be done.

Vince: HSG was also involved in the travel-ban litigation. We took a case on behalf of a client in an individual capacity who was an asylee from Syria. The client came to the U.S. and was forced to leave his wife and young child behind in Syria. He had filed a derivative asylum petition for his wife and child to be able to come to the U.S., and while this was pending, the travel ban was signed. We took over the case, and filed an action seeking injunctive relief after the first travel ban. By the time the case was heard, the revised ban had been signed. HSG attorneys obtained the first injunction against the revised travel ban, and the government agreed to keep the injunction in place as to our client until the asylum application was granted. The family was reunited about a year ago and they are all now together in Wisconsin. It's not often that you get to help a client with something that is truly life or death. It was a really gratifying case.

Blair: As an observer at the firm, it was amazing to watch the enthusiasm and passion of the associates.

Vince: Also, in this U.S. Supreme Court term, HSG has filed seven or eight amicus briefs on a pro bono basis. We have filed amicus briefs in each of the two partisan gerrymandering cases, one on behalf of the Brennan Center and one on behalf of a group of bipartisan legislators. We also filed an amicus brief related to a death penalty case. We do quite a bit of amicus work. Some of that is driven by the partners, but a lot of that is driven by the associates at the firm.

DO MOST ATTORNEYS AT THE FIRM WORK ON PRO BONO MATTERS?

Vince: All associates at the firm are doing some type of pro bono work, it just varies by person and by year. But, last month, every single associate billed some pro bono time.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST MEMORABLE PRO BONO EXPERIENCE?

Vince: Definitely the travel ban case, because it was so personal. The family came to New York after the case was over and met with us at the firm – it was quite something. People were in tears. It's not every day where you feel like you have made such a change to someone's life.

Blair: In addition to incredibly rewarding work on behalf of a survivor of sexual assault, I worked with a team seeking access to public school records for special education students. Two associates had oral arguments in that case, and it was gratifying to see them succeed.

Vince: It's very rewarding to see the professional development and the sense of pride. We are a very tightknit group and all the lawyers feel professionally invested in these cases. It's nice that folks can work on things that are meaningful at a macro level and potentially have a large impact in the U.S., but also do things that are meaningful to them, such as making sure a prisoner has food. The firm encourages associates to take on cases that are meaningful to them.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER ATTORNEYS CONSIDERING PRO BONO WORK?

Blair: I would encourage other lawyers to find a cause they really care about and do something that they find rewarding. A lot of people at big firms end up doing pro bono work because someone else is interested in that issue, but it's a lot more rewarding where there is personal meaning. Also, pro bono is a great way to develop new skills and relationships with other attorneys.

Vince: I would say to be proactive, take initiative. Sometimes firms have pro bono matters that come to them; it's good to take the initiative and try to find a matter that you are interested in personally and professionally. Pro bono is a good way to give back to the community, and it's part of our professional responsibility as attorneys.

Thank you to Blair and Vince for telling us about the great work being done at the firm, and thank you to all of the attorneys at Holwell Shuster & Goldberg for your commitment to pro bono. Keep up the good work!

This two-part Q&A originally appeared on the ABA Center for Pro Bono website on April 24 and April 26 (see [here](#) and [here](#)).

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